



## Questionnaire for theatre expert

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Please answer the following questions giving specific examples where possible:

### **Experience and Expertise**

Outline your experience and expertise in the area of theatre

I graduated from the Free actors' school as a part of the troupe ATF-1 /Actor theater formation-1/, during the 90s I directed and played in the troupe, which was composed by its students. Since 2002 until now I have participated in projects related to social and applied theater, mainly as a member of the theater "Flower". I have been through training courses in psycho-drama, forum theater, theater of the specific place, theater and drama in education /TIE, DIE/, theater of the senses – Labyrinth and others. I have worked with all kinds of social groups. Since 2012 I am a member of the Free Theater Association (FTA) and of Atelier Play-dough – space for free art in Sofia.

What has been the impact of theatre on your own life?

Arts – and theater in particular – is the only inherently free territory for the human spirit. Theater helps me to contemplate my own freedom and to search for the common through the individual.



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What impact do you think theatre can have on our lives and what you consider to be its instrumental value (i.e. the way theatre can be used in particular settings rather than theatre as art or entertainment)?

Based on my entire experience in the field of applied theater, I consider that assigning specific social functions narrows the totality of the theater experience. On the other hand, if theater is considered as a playfield, it offers an unlimited variety of communicative, hence therapeutic, cognitive, etc. forms and models and is an invaluable tool in the social and educational spheres. Unfortunately, in this regard, Bulgaria is still very far from the practices, established during the last decades in such leading countries as Great Britain for example.

Theater (and arts in general of course) combined with playing, creates a neutral meeting territory. Human beings have an inherent need and capacity to play. We play all the time, we enter and exit roles (of a parent, a child, a manager, a mentor, an authority, of someone who is in love), we create plans and scenarios, consciously or subconsciously model our behavior.

Theater however takes away the imposition and brings us out of the clutches of necessity. The person is empowered, according his/her own choice and without a life-imposed necessity for that, to create and destroy roles.

Theater gives you the opportunity to do for someone and through someone something, with which you surprise even yourself and for which you can receive an appraisal and applause. It gives you confidence that you can be different according to your own choices, that you can entertain the others, to be interesting, funny, scary, unpredictable, good, bad, smart or stupid. The stage gives you the power to say things you would never say in your everyday communication, to find new means to express yourself. It increases your self-assessment.

What strategies do you use and how do you work with hard to reach groups or people who are not usually engaged with theatre or who might be reluctant to take part?

It is a very general question – I could write a whole paper on it. People are engaged when they see 1. That something is fun, interesting, pleasing 2. They can do it. The theater convention is comprehensible at a very basic level – the only necessary things are a place (stage), one doing (actor) and one viewing (audience) person. Experience is also needed to take a look through the eyes of this hard to reach group (whatever that means).

### **Theatre and Working with visually impaired people**



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Describe any experience you have had of working with visually impaired people either with theatre or in some other capacity.

Yes, I have had such. I worked within one school year under a project of Theater “Flower” in the school for visually impaired children “Louis Braille”. The group consisted of 10-15 kids aged 7-15, about half of them completely blind. A part had other problems as well.

How was working with visually impaired people (if there was such work) different to the way you would normally work?

I will quote a part of the guidelines, developed as a result of the mentioned project:

Most of what we learned from the mere the beginning about their capacities for communication and orientation in space, is mostly kind of obvious to those with healthy vision, but only after we personally face them we discover their value. For example the sound orientation, the fact that if you have not stated vocally your presence you are absent for them, the meaning of “seeing” through the hands, the careful listening, the sensitivity to all kinds of sounds.

Most of the kids demonstrate excessive economy of body movements, because, as it appears, most of what we accumulate as body culture we master and feed through visual images. Fullness, aesthetics of movements, gesture details are something foreign to the completely blind. Moving their fingers in order to make them wave their forefinger for the “no” gesture cost us a lot of efforts. Making some progress required each kid to be individually stimulated many times – for example in connection with some kind of dance movements – so that the gesture would become habitual. If the activities are interrupted for a certain period of time, the memory of the mastered gesture gradually fades away, because there is no visual model to nurture it. Movement exercises of this type require a lot of time and patience and most important – people, available to work individually with the kids. We were so happy when we had more volunteers.

What impact has working with visually impaired young people (if there was such work) had on your own practice?

It broadened my perception of the world and made me think about the visually impaired and their needs. On the one hand their world is different from the world of the sighted ones, on the other hand they do not want (righteously) to be considered as people with some deficit, handicapped, etc. Society must take into careful consideration these special needs members without isolating them.

The world of the sighted people is too centered in itself, considering the ability to see as a “norm” and the blindness as a considerable misfortune. Omitted is the fact that the ordeal not to



be able to see teaches you many other things, that the world of the visually impaired is not a simple subset of the world, but is autonomous, having its own laws.

What do you think is the value for visually impaired young people of working through theatre?

Becoming our friends and working with us influenced them in all aspects – emotionally and intellectually. The stage performance gave them self-esteem, we broadened their sensory specter with the various exercises and games.

## **VISION**

What do you think we should consider regarding the use of theatre in the VISION project?

It depends on the project aims, the target group (age, level of impairment), etc.

What do you think could be the impact of this work?

It should be positive and to work against the social isolation of the visually impaired.

**Please attach a current CV with this questionnaire!**

Thanking you for your time and consideration:

The V.I.S.I.ON team

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